

## **Progress on a school funding plan is possible this session**

By Bill Keim and Nancy Moffatt

As the executive directors for two associations representing most of the school district leaders in this state, we are deeply committed to finding an equitable plan to better serve all students in Washington. We appreciate the work that's occurred both behind the scenes and through various legislative proposals to address the McCleary decision.

Bills introduced this year in both the House and Senate identified important elements that need to be part of the court-ordered plan. Resolving the differences between the bills remains the greatest task — but it is not impossible.

Any acceptable plan must address the two most challenging elements for the Legislature to resolve: educator compensation and the unconstitutional use of local levies to fund basic education. The issues are intertwined, since over half of local levies are currently spent on basic education compensation.

To their credit, the Senate has introduced multiple specific proposals which, if implemented, would quickly begin to address the unconstitutional aspects of our current system. An important element of these bills prohibits levy support of basic education compensation. Without that prohibition, the fundamentals of McCleary are ignored. Since these proposals are so bold and complex, it difficult to imagine a resolution this session.

Across the chamber, the House bill is basically a plan to plan. The Supreme Court is likely to view that approach as too little, too late. If so, it could prompt the sanctions they withheld in their September contempt order, pending legislative progress during this session. While some may prefer to see how the Supreme Court responds, that kind of constitutional crisis doesn't seem to be in the best interest of our citizens.

A third alternative that might garner the support of both chambers and the Supreme Court received informal support from a group of key House Republicans and Democrats during a May 21<sup>st</sup> work session convened by Rep. Ross Hunter. Their proposal began with a commitment to fund basic education compensation.

As a starting point, the group's assumption was that 90 percent of current total compensation was basic education. That totals about \$1.5 billion in additional state funding per year, but that assumption would be adjusted as better data are gathered regarding those costs. Other details of the system would be developed between now and 2018 through the kind of planning suggested in

the House bill.

We strongly encourage bipartisan deliberation around that kind of significant, but more limited step. It makes substantial progress toward an overall solution while recognizing that more thoughtful planning is needed for the comprehensive solution. Such an approach fulfills the needs of the Supreme Court, our schools, our students, and our citizens.

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